

Better(not bigger)Vermont



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Westford citizens didn't swallow the bait and hook.

You may have read about the November 7th Special Town Meeting vote in Westford (Chittenden County) on a proposed public wastewater septic system. The State and its pro-growth allies were ready to cover over 90% of the \$4.4 million capital cost (i.e., the bait). All the citizens of Westford had to do was approve a \$400,000, 30-year bond. But 52% of voters rejected it... <https://vtdigger.org/2023/11/29/mired-in-controversy-westfords-4-million-wastewater-project-faces-uncertain-future/>.

Westford's Planning Commission pushed hard for the project and even created a whole website to sell the project (<https://www.westfordsfuture.com/>). But a group of committed and passionate citizens organized an opposition effort. They were rightfully concerned that the project would enable one or more large-scale developments to swallow their quaint rural town. How did they do it?

They attended almost every meeting of the Planning Commission and the Wastewater Project Committee. They created a great website to publicize their points and included videos (<https://www.ruralwestford.com/home>). They convinced other residents to place about 100 lawn signs, many of them on the main drag (Rt 128). They took every opportunity to talk with their neighbors. And they prevailed even though their town's Front Porch Forum selectively censored them (but published pro-project posts).

Missteps taken by the pro-growth side also helped sink the bond. One of their major arguments was that the water in the Town Hall and Library was contaminated. But when the Keeping Westford Rural folks checked that claim, they found it to be false. As you might expect, their fact-checking followed Brandolini's Law (or the BS Asymmetry Principal) in that it took an order-of-magnitude more work to refute this claim than it took to create the false illusion in the first place.

Another misstep: Just this year, the legislature passed S.100, which mandated that any town with a public water and wastewater treatment facility **MUST allow things like...**

- **four story, four-unit buildings anywhere if they can access the services; and**
- **five or more dwelling units per acre.**

In short, S. 100 is such an egregious overreach of central control that citizens are disincentivized to approve local wastewater facilities. It's too bad that Vermont's State Legislature is currently populated with those more inclined to represent developers and their allies over the interests of many if not most Vermonters.

Here's some advice that the pro-rural folks offer others opposing wastewater treatment projects in their rural town...

- **Consider creating a political action committee (PAC) early if you plan to advertise, make lawn**

signs, print flyers/handouts, etc. Expenditure over \$1000 triggers mandatory reports to the Secretary of State (Board of Elections), and the name & address for the PAC must be on all printed materials.

- Try to make the ballot question (article) be a referendum on the project as well as a vote on the municipal bond. This may require two articles on the ballot.
- Lastly, research the credibility of supporting facts, and don't stoop to using bullying or insulting tactics, even if your opponents do so.

A new book reports on why government agencies can't stop our addiction to growth.

Brian Czech, founder of the Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy (CASSE), has a new book chronicling his efforts to get the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acknowledge the inherent conflict between economic growth and wildlife conservation. This conflict is, by the way, admitted in the preamble of the *Endangered Species Act*.

I'm also a former federal employee who entered civil service in hopes of working for the "common good," and I can corroborate Brian's revelation that government bureaucracies serve only the politically-powerful (meaning mostly "monied") interests. Americans can't depend on the federal or state governments to necessarily do the right thing. The government's refusal to acknowledge the conflict

between economic growth and our natural resources will continue as long as Citizens United is the law of the land.

Dr. Czech was very brave for doggedly trying to push an incredibly important but inconvenient truth up the civil service ladder. We thank Brian for his efforts and for telling his story; and we encourage you to read Brian's book, *Gag Ordered No More*.

Two short articles and a video worth reading/watching...

First, a 'Beyond Growth' conference discovers that the press won't report on their meeting...

<https://bylinetimes.com/2023/05/23/isnt-journalism-about-finding-new-stories-the-climate-news-the-media-ignores/>.

Fortunately, 60 Minutes reports on mass extinctions resulting from continuing growth in the human-sphere...

https://youtu.be/6TqhcZsxrPA?si=GFV-d4uF_8PmBJ9X

If everyone else followed Japan's lead, we wouldn't have a CO2 emissions problem or need a COP 29...

<https://6k86l.r.bh.d.sendibt3.com/mk/mr/sh/SMJz0ACyFvfrbij7buWbJY03uME7/w0kcJ8iFWWju> (don't worry, the url is legit).

Although all "western" nations have low native fertility rates, the big difference is that Japan doesn't have high rates of immigration.

Year-end appeal

We wouldn't be a proper non-profit if we didn't ask for your charitable donation at this time of year.

Although we have no paid staff, we have expenses such as a website, occasional research projects, and public outreach, all in pursuit of a better, but not bigger, Vermont. If you want to help, please mail your tax-deductible donation to...

**Better(not bigger)Vermont
122 Station Rd
South Hero, VT 05486.**

Yes, there is a way to donate via PayPal on our website. But do you really want 4% to stay with PayPal?

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